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THE DELIGHTFUL FARCE OF KRIS-KRINGLE

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SANTA CLAUS would arrive at ten o'clock. All was romance. Even the "grown-ups" were secretly determined in their heart of hearts to bring back some of the old feeling of Christmas delight. For every girl "grown-up" remembers with what glee she has for months nursed a dolly that, having once very prettily shut its eyes at the night-time, never opened them again; and every boy "grown-up" has still a sneaking regard for the tin locomotive, which, after being wound up, for more than five minutes ran in a small circle, and ever after had to be dragged round on three wheels, without tender or cab. And so there was a feeling of delicious self-imposed awe for the kind old benefactor of youth.

Every child had been awake since four A.M. The girls had been told that Santa Claus would come, and so even the most imaginative of them did not allow their thoughts to depart from dutiful and absolute belief.

The boys, however, were divided into three classes: First, there were those who were too young to understand who was coming, and therefore were believers; second, there were those whose implicit faith in the good filler of stockings was adamant in its firmness; and, lastly, there were the sceptics.

The duties of Santa Claus were not light. He must make a good impression with the first group, he must maintain the respect of group number two, and, most of all, he must rescue from the swift-flowing river of doubt the faith of the sceptics, and, having rescued, must resuscitate. Also, it had been found advisable, owing largely to the fact that early associations had made some of the prominent doubters familiar with the genus antelope, to admit that even reindeer could not cover the wide world in one night, and that, in fact, Santa Claus was indigenous. Hence there entered into the already rocky road of the old grayhead the thorny element of competition, for Santa Toronto must not in any way be inferior to those of his colleagues who had previously benefited their young friends elsewhere. Furthermore, it had been set forth by the revolutionists that the part of Santa Claus was a played one, and that it would be taken by some familiar figure disguised by the judicious addition of pillows and by a gorgeous dress. How then was this theory to be met, for the old gentleman was certainly stout? Truly, trouble galore had even he to contend with.

Of a sudden a great clatter of sleigh-bells and hoofs was heard. Santa Claus was here! Resplendent with flowing robes of red, trimmed with ermine, in a beautiful red cutter drawn by two snow-white ponies, and sitting on holly-decked bundles, he appeared. Swiftly he sped towards the girls. Shrieks of awe-mingled delight filled the air. Majestically he alighted from his sleigh and began unpacking his beautiful bundles.

"Gussie Harrington! Where's Gussie?" cried Santa in the midst of his kind work.

"Here I am," came a sweet little voice.

"Here you are, my dear," said he, handing her a lovely bundle, in which was a dolly, a stove, a picture-book, a set of dishes, and other useful things for a little doll-house-keeper. "Do you know me?"

"You're Dr. M.," quickly came the reply.

Santa was dumfounded. Poor little Gussie, whose painfully swollen eyelids he had for months had to tenderly pull apart to put in the cruelly smarting drops, whose case had been pronounced hopeless, who had never seen the light of day, had actually penetrated a mask of which she knew nought, and had recognized the hands and the eyes of the one who had so unwillingly tortured her. And why were her eyes uncovered to-day?

"She can see to-day for the first time," was whispered in Santa's ear.

Here was shattered romance replaced by romance. Little by little had Gussie improved, thanks to careful, kind nursing, and from first being able to tell light from darkness, she had improved so during the last week that on this day of days she could actually see. Santa Claus sped away with a lump in his throat.

The babies were frightened half to death. The tremendously tall, stout old gentleman with gray head and beard, offset by such red cheeks and nose, was too much for them, and made to their poor little minds a picture of indescribable terror. Their screams could be heard for blocks.

The romance of the "grown-ups" received a severe shock. What a harsh demonstration to these innocent babes of the fact that the truest pleasures which they would in years to come enjoy would be those which were preceded by much pain.

The kind old man soon won their little hearts, however, with his arms full of bunnies, dollies, bow-wows, and candies, and soon nothing but sunshine could be seen through the tears.

Were you afraid, Mistuh Smiff?" was asked of a smiling, chubby boy of four, with glorious blue eyes, curly hair, and talipes equinovarus of the left foot.

“No,” he replied; “Yanty Claus tuk hold my wusser foot, and he say ‘Helloa me,’ I say ‘Helloa him.’”

Mister Smith never acknowledges himself beaten, and always has satisfactory explanations. He’ll get on in the world.

Meanwhile, the terror of the babies was exceeded only by that of Santa Claus himself. For strange, weird changes had been taking place in his internal economy, and more than once he had caught sight of a white corner peeping out from under his red frock. Moreover, he was very stout, was very warmly clad, and had never been so long in any warm building before. He was feeling faint, and he still had his hardest task; for he had now to face the sceptics.

The boys had been becoming more and more worked up, and, as the royal equipage of the North approached, even the scoffers were carried away by the universal excitement. Fire-reels, gun-boats, windmills, and many other wonderful inventions absorbed the interest of all.

“Santa Claus, your teeth are coming out,” said a doubter, suddenly waxing bold.

Sure enough, a row of flat, square teeth were projecting straight out from Santa’s lower jaw, and did you not know Santa so well, you would have sworn that they were card-board.

“Santa Claus, what’s this?” said doubter number two, reaching out from his bed and seizing the small, white, projecting corner. A pillow dropped out onto the floor!

A great howl of derision went up. Santa Claus summoned all his forces for one last supreme effort. ’Twas no use, and the last the boys saw of Santa Claus was a red streak, dropping here a pillow, there a pillow, till a kind corner hid from view the escape of the kind old man from a building where his gray hairs had been so little respected.

The charm of romance was broken. Truly a just reward for those who would deceive the sick! But where were the sick? For—and this is the one mainstay of those who labor in this saddest branch of medical life—with smiling faces these little heroes, with fortitude worthy of Spartans, keep their sufferings entirely *under the bed-clothes*.

The delightful farce of Kris-Kringle was over for another year.

